

## **Family Support Services 2014 Annual Report**

### **Overview**

SOFIA House is a unique and valuable opportunity for women and children fleeing from domestic violence to be safe and to live healthy lives free of violence. Family Support Shelter Workers provide support and assistance from the initial intake, which continues throughout the duration of their stay, up to and including their departure, as well as outreach after they leave SOFIA House. Family Support Shelter Workers collaborate with the women to identify and address a wide range of areas where they feel they need guidance and support. As issues are identified, Family Support Shelter Workers assist in addressing them through a variety of means, including counseling, community referrals and advocacy and women's programming, all of which are ongoing components of the SOFIA House mission to end the cycles of Domestic violence.

### **Counseling**

The programming at SOFIA House ensures every client has the opportunity to receive individual counseling. Counseling is an essential component of a woman's stay at SOFIA House, through which Family Support Shelter Workers are able to adequately assess the unique needs of each family. Journals are also used as they provide a visual tool for clients and offer additional and alternative means of communicating with their Family Support Shelter Worker. With their FSSW, Women are able to address not only their domestic violence experiences, but also issues such as low self-esteem, single family parenting, healthy relationships and goal setting to list but a few. Family Support Shelter Workers essentially help the women navigate through their current situation and assist them to devise a plan for their future. The women often value these meetings and enjoy the time spent with their Family Support Shelter Worker. These positive relationships consequently lead to the women frequently stopping by to check in with the Family Support Shelter Workers several times throughout each week. This connection with the women allows Family Support Shelter Workers to assist the women in addressing their short and long term goals and also indicates how valuable on site support can be even though the contact may appear trivial.

### **Advocacy**

SOFIA House clients are often not aware of their rights and/or have difficulties advocating for themselves. Clients who are able to advocate for themselves, often need guidance and support in appropriate methods of doing so. As a result, Family Support Shelter Workers also act as advocates on behalf of the women when they require additional support. Because each woman's circumstance is unique, the occasion when advocacy is required varies. Some instances which often require advocacy are regarding; legal appointments, attending court, talking circles, Victim

Services, speaking with police, communicating with the various departments of social services, medical situations, as well as communicating with their children's fathers and schools among others. Advocating on their behalf ensures that the women understand their rights and are able to voice their concerns. Advocacy is also an instrumental opportunity for Family Support Shelter Workers to model assertiveness for the women. Through this process the women learn how to become self-advocates and are given the ability to practice this in a safe, assertive way.

### **Community Networking**

Family Support Shelter Workers strive to foster relationships with a large network of agencies within Regina in order to better support clients while they are living at SOFIA House and for continued support once they have moved on. It is essential to provide clients with concrete community connections to ensure they can continue to be successful when living independently in the community. Family Support Shelter Workers engage with and make referrals to community agencies on behalf of the women and the children and is an essential part of the services offered at SOFIA House. Referral agencies over the past year have included; Family Service Regina Domestic Violence Unit, Regina Work Preparation Centre, Fox Valley Counseling Services, The Regina Early Learning Centre, Regina Women's Centre, Catholic Family Services, Prairie Spirit Connections, Circle Project, Four Directions, Mental Health, Addictions Services, Core Ritchie, Rainbow Youth, Child & Youth Services, Kids First, Regina Open Door Society, Regina Immigrant Women, Saskjobs, High Conflict Resolution Program, Maintenance enforcement office, Regina Food Bank, Legal Aid and the Good Food Box.

### **Progress Report on 2013 Goals**

The Annual General report in 2013 summarized a number of challenges and goals for SOFIA House programming. The goals outlined include continuing and strengthening support for present and past clients, and providing casual in-house daycare to offer clients increased opportunity to participate in community programming and referrals in an effort to strengthen beneficial ties to the Regina community in an attempt to solidify future success.

The steps that have been taken to strengthen and continue support for clients has been addressed by constantly evaluating the daily operations at SOFIA House. FSSW create individual case plans with clients to best meet their particularized needs and are continuously researching resources for each client. Over this past year FSSW have also revised journaling in an effort to enlist more enthusiasm from clients. The physical appearance of the journals has been individualized for each client and FSSW's have taken a more structured approach by providing questions to be answered each week. This approach has presented more consistent and relevant communications from clients. There is still some resistance to journaling which requires staff to follow through with weekly reminders, but it is a valued tool for both clients and staff

and efforts will continue to be made. FSSW have participated in both individual and team professional developments to optimize the level of support clients receive at SOFIA House. Over the year, at least one staff member has received additional training in Medicine Wheel Facilitation, Leadership Development, Reality Therapy Choice Theory: Counseling for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, U of R Inspiring Leadership, Conflict Resolution and Group Trauma Crisis Intervention.

Efforts have also been made to meet last year's goal of providing casual in-house daycare to provide clients with increased opportunity to participate in community programming and referrals in an effort to strengthen beneficial ties to the Regina community in an attempt to solidify future success. This has been ongoing work in progress. September through December in 2013 SOFIA House was able to secure a volunteer who provided in-house daycare for two hours, twice a week. Clients were required to sign up for a designated time slot the week before and were only allowed to participate once per month to ensure every client could benefit from the program. The feedback received regarding the program was very positive and there were many requests from clients to continue. Unfortunately, we were unable to secure a volunteer to continue throughout the rest of the year. However, staff will continue to search for a volunteer to fill this need in the future.

### **Addressing Goals/Challenges of SHOP**

Throughout the past year FSSW's have been focusing on the goals for the SOFIA House Outreach Program (SHOP). The goals outlined were to offer both past and present clients a spiritual outlet, which staff has continuously strived for throughout the year, and to improve contact with outreach clients. Improvements have been made in strengthening contact with past clients by initializing the conversation about outreach during their stay at SOFIA House and including clients in the conversation about what kind of support they want after leaving SOFIA House, as well as discussing the level of support that can be offered after they move. A regular scheduled time for SHOP has also been beneficial as clients are able to schedule around the upcoming program. FSSW's have also started visiting clients in their new homes to allow them the opportunity to show off their new found independence and offer support through the loneliness that can accompany the transition. It does however remain challenging at times to stay in contact with previous clients, as some lead transient life styles. Other challenges that were outlined for the program, were providing transportation to and from SOFIA House for the program for those who struggle with balancing young children and work; and insufficient space and staff to supervise children in a designated area, so as not to distract the women from the therapeutic atmosphere. FSSW's have been working with clients on an individual basis to arrange transportation to and from the program, offering transportation one way if necessary. Space and staff to supervise children continues to be an ongoing challenge, but staff continue to make efforts to combat this obstacle.

**Summation: Challenges and Future Goals for upcoming year**

Over the coming year FSSW's will work towards revamping the tools used to measure programming outcomes. Firstly, FSSW's are redesigning the assessment tool used evaluate the condition of clients' homes, which will provide staff with an objective gauge of how clients are coping with daily living and would also give insight into possible skills that might be needed for clients. Secondly, FSSW's will engage in creating corresponding intake and end evaluations. This will provide clients with an illustration of their self achievements at SOFIA House and also serve to assess the current programming. The outcome measures focused on will be the individual client goals which they have strived to meet through participation at SOFIA House and the level of support clients received while living at SH. The evaluation will provide insight into what changes potentially need to be made in the programming, as well as what areas staff can improve on to ensure the supports, services and programming offered at SOFIA House will continue to grow and meet the identified needs of the women and children living at SOFIA House. The outlined goals are in an effort to meet the mission of a safe, supportive environment, which provides onsite programming, education and awareness. The hope is that the families who come to SOFIA House will be able to break the cycle of violence and not only lead, but maintain healthy and violence-free lives now and in the future.

*"My sister used to stay here and she really wants me to get in cause it helped her....she never went back to that relationship. She said she got away from it cause she lived here.....I just want to end the cycle, I remember living here with my mom when I was little. I don't want my son thinking he can treat women like that just because he doesn't know no better."*

Respectfully submitted by;

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